Fear and a Cold Day in Hell

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Fear and a Cold Day in Hell

by Azure_K_Mello

Summary

After their aborted night at the opera Hannibal came over for waffles. And, one night, Hannibal brings his mother's cookies to eat while watching snow fall but things go wrong when the power went out. Hannibal doesn't like power outs.

This story makes vague references to Hannibal Rising.

It wasn't early when he heard a car pull up but he was still mostly asleep. His alarm had gone off a couple of times but he'd just hit the snooze button. The dogs were up, he could hear them and Harry was the only one still on the bed. He heard the tires on the gravel and rolled over. Stroking Harry he said, "Time is it, boy?" He looked at his clock and saw it was almost ten. He reached for his glasses as he sat up and said, "I can't believe Hannibal didn't call before coming. Isn't that rude?" he asked the dog. It was rude and Hannibal was usually fastidious about manners. But Will didn't care about manners and he was pleased to get out of bed; he would never get to sleep that night if he didn't get up now. There was a knock at the door and Will rolled out of bed, scratching his stomach. He opened the door, squinting in the bright light. The man waiting there wearing a warm coat and gloves but Will saw he was out of his suit. His pants and shoes were elegant but far more casual than usual.

"Hey," he said, voice rough with sleep. "Come in," he saw his car and boat behind Hannibal and felt himself smile at the sight.

"I did not intend to wake you," said Hannibal taking in his boxers and t-shirt. "I was worried as you were not answering you phone."

Will went to where he'd dropped his suit pants and pulled out his phone. "It's still on that totally silent setting you put it on."

Hannibal hung up his coat and Will saw he was in shirtsleeves. Will swallowed as the man said, "You should not have left your best suit on the floor."

"As I fell into bed at three-thirty the suit's lucky I didn't sleep in it." Will smiled, as he picked it up and hung it over the sofa arm. "If you give me a minute to brush my teeth and get dressed I'll make coffee."

"If you will allow me to take the liberty I will make the coffee."

"Okay," Will nodded, "thank you. I'll be just a couple of minutes."

"Take your time. I did not mean to drag you out of bed."

"I probably wouldn't have slept tonight if you hadn't," Will said as he went back into his bedroom. As he washed his face and brushed his teeth he heard the noise of kibble hitting the dog bowls and he smiled. Hannibal wasn't fond of his dogs but he was feeding them.

He took a leak and shaved quickly, using an electric razor that allowed him to keep his stubble. He hated being clean shaven. He could easily be mistaken for a college kid when he was clean shaven. He already walked around projecting "natural victim" to the world, looking young and slight just emphasized it. He dabbed on his aftershave without thinking. It was purely habit and he only remembered afterwards how much Hannibal disliked it.

He dressed in jeans and a flannel shirt. He went into the kitchen barefooted and was greeted by the smell of coffee. He sighed happily. Walking in he said, "Thank you for making the coffee."

Hannibal stood from where he was crouch, patting Daniel on the head. “It was no problem. You did not get home until three-thirty?”

“I was home at three but I had to search the house before I could go to bed.”

Hannibal watched him silently as Will got the waffle iron and gathered the ingredients. “Had you lost something?” Hannibal finally asked.

“Only my sense of security.” He told Hannibal about Jack being angry at him, about the case and the hidden killer. Finally he said, “I was afraid there was someone in my house. My fears are always so childish.” He sneered at himself, “So much for the FBI special agent.”

“Most fear is childish,” Hannibal said, “fear is a base instinct; it is primal. It stays with us so that we remember to take care of ourselves. It is informed by our situations. Last night you were in a house with a hiding murderer without a weapon to protect yourself. Of course you were driven to search your space. Fear of poverty, illness, pain all grow from the same root: uncertainty. Your work with Jack Crawford has brought a lot of uncertainty to your ordered world.”

“I tried to quit again.”

“Tried?” Hannibal repeated.

“Maybe if Alana writes an official recommendation that I leave the field Jack will be forced to remove me. If I get a critical mass of psychiatrists saying I’m not up for this the Bureau will listen.” He poured himself a cup of coffee and got a bowl to make the mix. “I’m really sorry about leaving you last night.”

“It was unavoidable, Will.”

“He triangulated my phone. But I still feel badly.”

“Nonsense, Will, I drank champagne and watched the end of a beautiful opera. You got shouted at by Jack, were exposed to new horrors and didn’t see your bed until the wee hours of the morning.”

“We were supposed to get dinner.”

“Yes, you had Burger King and I ate those delicious catfish cakes you made. I’m very sorry you had such a rough night but, save for my lack of your company, I had quite a nice evening.”

“Good, I’m pleased it wasn’t a total loss. How does Aida end?”

“After they are discovered Aida manages to get away. Radamès stands trial for the affair. He is told that if he will renounce Aida and marry the princess all will be forgiven or he will be put to death. He refuses. The princess begs for his life; she forgives him. But, for his treason, he is entombed alive. He accepts it, happy in the knowledge that Aida got away safely but as he accepts his fate he hears breathing. She snuck down, hid, so that they would die together.”

“They die?” Will asked, turning. “That’s the end?”

“Yes.”

“But they were supposed run away and be fine,” said Will, feeling his heart thud.

He didn’t look at the man — went back to the mix — didn’t want Hannibal to realize that it upset him. “Did you want them to have a happy ending?”

“I want everyone to have a happy ending. They so rarely happen in real life. Plays with singing should always end on a kiss.”

“It does end on a kiss, Will. They accept their fate. He chooses to die instead of forsake his love and she chooses to die with the man she loves. They chose their death. It does end on a kiss.” Will didn’t reply, considering it, “The next show I plan on bringing you to is Le nozze di Figaro. It is extremely happy.”

“I liked going, a lot. And I liked meeting your young friend, Rachel.”

“Good.” Will got the waffle iron out and Hannibal said, “That machine looks older than me.”

“You don’t look old,” Will said. He meant it as a compliment but he was always unsure about subtle complements, if they came across. It was a double one making two waffles side by side, stainless steel, very space age. “It probably is older than you. It’s from sixty-eight.”

Hannibal nodded, “I was born in sixty-nine.”

“It was a wedding gift to my parents from my father’s favorite aunt. He gave it to me when I went to college.”

Every Saturday morning his dad had made them waffles. Will had always loved them with too much syrup and too much butter. Back before he’d been born his family had lived in New Orleans, it had only been after his mom died that they’d started moving all around the south. They moved with whatever could fit in duffel bags and the back of the truck. The little apartments they rented always had furniture and Will never had many personal possessions but the waffle iron had gone everywhere and as older brothers drifted off, moved back to New Orleans, his dad had still made Will waffles every Saturday. When Will had gotten into college in Colorado he’d told his dad over their waffles. His dad had sighed and said, “Will, that’s landlocked, honey. Where am I gonna get a job?”

“Daddy, I’ll be okay,” Will had promised. “I picked Boulder because they’re giving me full scholarship and they have a great forensics department. I’ll be okay by myself. Go wherever you want. I’ll see you during the summer and at Christmas.”

“It’s so weird to me: my baby grew up. You’re the first Graham to go to college. I’m so proud of you. When you go you should bring the waffle iron so that when I call you on Saturdays I’ll know what you’re up to.”

Will had smiled, “I really like that idea but then you won’t have a waffle iron.”

“I could do with losing a few pounds,” his dad had said.

Every Saturday during college he’d made waffles, sometimes by himself, sometimes with boyfriends. It always made him feel less homesick. He greased the iron and started to cut up a mango as the iron warmed up and said, “If you want milk or juice or anything help yourself. My kitchen is yours.” He put the mango in a bowl and washed blueberries before adding them. He poured the mix into the irons and said, “Now’s the hard part.” He reached for the pomegranate and said, “I’ve never been any good at these.”

Hannibal came to him and said, “Allow me. It will be fast work.” He rolled up his sleeves, clearly not wanting the red juice to leave stains. He washed his hands and then reached for the pomegranate.

“Thanks,” said Will holding out the fruit and a sharp knife. He went to the fridge to get the butter, honey, jam, maple syrup and heavy cream to whip. He got a bowl and whisk and started in on the cream.

Hannibal smiled and said, “Do you put this much effort into breakfast when you are alone, Will?”

“Every weekend I make a waffle but I just have maple syrup and butter.”

Hannibal shook his head, “That is not maple syrup. It is made of corn.”

“It’s delicious,” Will responded. He watched Hannibal’s work as he whipped the cream. They lapsed into silence and Hannibal added sugar to the fruit salad and Will said, “Would you please grab the plates?” They moved around each other and it almost felt like a dance to Will. The kitchen was Hannibal’s natural habitat and seeing him so at home in Will’s space made Will happy. He finished the cream just as the bell on the iron dinged. He took the plates from where Hannibal had placed them and slid the waffles onto them. They were golden and smelled amazing. “It’s older than either of us but it still makes good waffles.” He got knives and spoons for all of the toppings and utensils for eating.

The waffle was divided into fourths which made it easy for Will to fix it half with fruit salad and whipped cream and half butter and syrup. Hannibal made his plate pretty, artfully arranging the cream and fruit before adding a fine drizzle of honey. It was nice, Will thought, that they could both have breakfast the way they wanted. He took a bite and it was delicious. The phone rang and Will sighed, “Your father?” asked Hannibal.

“Yeah, he’s the only one with my house number. Excuse me.” He stood and grabbed the phone off the hook. Leaning against the counter Will answered saying, “Hi, daddy.”

“Hi, honey. How are you?”

“I’m good. How are you?”

“Good, what are you up to?"

"Hannibal and I were just sitting down to waffles.”

“Oh, did you use the iron?”

“Yes, I’m showing it off.”

“Well then, I’m gonna shower and go to the store. I want to hear all about the opera and your boat.”

“I’ll take pictures on my phone and send them to you.”

“Yes please. I’ll call you this evening?”

“I’ll call you. Six o’clock?”

“Sounds good, honey.”

“Okay, love you.”

“Love you too, Will.”

He hung up and said, “Sorry.”

“You are very close, are you not?”

“Very,” agreed Will as he put the phone on the hook. “I need to take pictures of the boat. And I realized that I don’t have a picture of all of my dogs.” Will went back to eating his waffle and asked, “What’s your plan for the day?”

“I don’t really have one. I have a lot of patients’ notes to go over. What is your plan?”

“I was going to go to a hardware store. I need some supplies.”

After breakfast he drove Hannibal home. They listened to classical music and Hannibal didn’t comment on Will’s driving so Will figured his spatial recognition had gotten a lot better.

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It was nice to forget to eat meals because he was busy with something pleasant. He got obsessed with it. He stripped the whole boat and fixed the welding and reinforced the weak spots. He sanded the paint and rust off and he ripped out the old, gross flooring. He took pictures for his dad and got all his dogs to sit still for a photo for his wallet. He taught class and Jack didn’t interrupt his life for two weeks.

That made it hard for him to find an excuse to see Hannibal. There was no reason for him to go to Baltimore; no case to make it seem plausible that he was in the area. But that was probably a good thing. He needed a little space to stop imagining a world where Hannibal was his. Then one night after dinner there was a knock at the door while Will was sitting on the floor, fixing the latest section of the motor he’d taken out to fix before covering the boat for the night. It was too cold to do the delicate work outside and snow was falling. The dog

instantly rushed to see who it was while Will was standing and walking to the door far more sedately.

“Calm down, boys, calm down.” He opened the door expecting Alana. She was the only person who lived close enough to stop by. But Hannibal was standing there. “Hi, what are you doing here?” Then he shook his head, “Sorry, I mean, come in.” He stepped back from the door.

“I made poppy seed cookies,” said Hannibal. “They are wonderful with hot cocoa. I wanted to share them with you while it snows.”

Will smiled, “That’s very kind of you.”

“My mother used to make them when I was young.”

“Where are you from, Hannibal? I know it’s Europe but where are you actually from?”

“Lithuania.”

“Do you like it there?”

Hannibal went into the kitchen, taking milk from Will’s fridge as he spoke. “I was eleven when my parents and sister died. My family was very wealthy and we had a castle.” He chuckled as he poured the milk into a saucer, “Wealthy is an understatement. After they died the government seized the house and turned it into an orphanage. I spent the next five years in my old bedroom with seven other boys.”

“My God, Hannibal, I’m so sorry. I had no idea.”

Hannibal didn’t look at him as he took a small metal grater an assortment of different colored chocolates. “When my uncle found me at sixteen he took me to a new home. And when I was eighteen I sued the government and got my home, the money and all my possessions back. I sold the house back to the government but took all of my parents’ art and personal things. I have no fondness for Lithuania, only my memories of my family.”

“I’m so sorry,” Will repeated.

“It happened before you were born. I miss them terribly but I’ve had thirty-six years without them. I’ve had twenty-eight years out of the orphanage and now I can look back without breaking down. I can make my mother’s cookies and share them with you.” He gave Will a gentle smile as he grated chocolate into the milk, “Would you stir the milk for me? It’s a three handed task.”

Will nodded and got a wooden spoon to stir. Hannibal retrieved vanilla and sugar from Will’s cupboards. The sugar and chocolate melted into it milk, making it thicken. The kitchen smelled comfortingly sweet. Hannibal got mugs as the milk began to bubble. Hannibal poured the mugs with swift hands, not spilling a drop. Will took both mugs to the table while Hannibal got the cookies.

“How’s the boat?” asked Hannibal as he took the lid off the box of cookies.

“The boat is good. Jack has been quiet so I’ve gotten a lot done. How are you? I haven’t seen you,” said Will looking at the man. Going for days on end without seeing each other was new after the way they’d been living in each other’s back pockets. He’d missed Hannibal more than he liked to admit.

“It’s been a good week. One of my patients had a huge breakthrough which is always a thrill. I care for my patients. I always try to help them make progress but sometimes I can’t help them and I find that distressing.”

“I’m so glad you were able to help,” Will tasted the hot chocolate and sighed, “That’s delicious.”

“People discount the flavor of white chocolate too frequently… I wasn’t able to help you.”

“I wasn’t mentally ill,” Will shrugged. “You brought me to two different neurologists so you did help.” Will tried one of the cookies; they were much simpler than most things Hannibal cooked. “Your mom was a good cook.”

“She was. We had a cook but she had weekends off and at our cabin we didn’t have any servants and then my mother would cook.”

“You had a cabin?” asked Will.

“Yes, but unlike the Hobbs young girls were very rarely murdered and eaten there.”

Will laughed and said, “Do you want to move into the living room where we can watch the snow?”

“That would be nice,” Hannibal nodded and picked up the box of cookies. They moved to the living room. Will whistled looking out the window, several inches had fallen in the hour they’d been in the kitchen.

“I don’t think you can drive in this,” said Will.

Hannibal looked surprised, “Where did this come from?”

Will shook his head and turned on his radio, the only piece of technology the house had. It was always tuned to the emergency channel or an old country station. The voice on the machine said, “As we’ve been saying all afternoon, if at all possible, we advise you to stay where you are. The snow is going to get worse and the wind is picking up. If possible, we suggest you shelter in place. Meteorologists are forecasting this to be our last storm of the season but it’s shaping up to be a dozy. We’re expecting power outs late tonight or early tomorrow morning. The metro has shut down and bus service has been suspended.”

Will sighed, “I’m turning up the heat now.” Will climbed the stairs and turned up the thermostat so that when the power went out, which it inevitably would this far out. He put towels on the bed for Hannibal but that was more for show than anything else. If the power went showers would be out of the question. He thought about that and called down the stairs, “Hannibal, do you want to take a shower now before we lose the power?”

“I showered after work, but thank you.” Will left the towels and some extra blankets on the bed.

Back downstairs he found the flashlights, the four Coleman lamps and candles. He stoked the fire up and took a sip of his still-warm still-delicious hot chocolate. Finally he arranged the candles so that once the power went he wouldn’t have to find them. “Do you think I should cook the chicken in the fridge? We’re going to have at least four hour of power. We’ll lose the oven and you’re probably going to be stuck here tomorrow. How does cold chicken sandwiches for lunch sound?”

“That would be lovely,” agreed Hannibal. They went into the kitchen and Hannibal looked out the window. “I had no idea this was coming. I didn’t mean to impose on you like this.”

“It’s no problem,” said Will as he got the chicken from the fridge. “I just feel badly for you. I’m sure at home you’d have a much better chance of keeping power.”

“I have a generator.”

Will shook his head, “I don’t but my water isn’t pumped so we’ll keep that, we have the fire and the stove will still work. I turned the heat up so upstairs will stay warm.” He started to wash the chicken and said, “What should I do with this? Usually I just do salt and pepper.”

Hannibal said, “If you’ll indulge me.” He rolled up his sleeves and washed his hands then he started to pull all sorts of spices from the cupboard. Will stepped back and let Hannibal do as he wished. He whipped honey, olive oil and vinegar to make a glaze then rubbed herbs under the skin and inside the cavity.

Will watched the muscles of his back flex. If he was Hannibal’s boyfriend he would walk up behind the man, put his arms around Hannibal’s waist and rest his chin on his shoulder and watch Hannibal’s hands close up. Hannibal would tilt his head away slightly, giving Will room to kiss his neck. Hannibal would let Will take his personal space and Will would actually want to take it. It would be perfect, mechanisms clicking together like a perfectly built engine, like they were made to last. Watching Hannibal’s lines, Will saw exactly where he would fit. He swallowed hard. He finished his hot chocolate to rewet his mouth and said, “If you have everything you need I’ll let the dogs out before the snow gets any deeper.”

“That would be a good idea,” agreed Hannibal, “I’m very content in this task. Thank you for allowing me to commandeer it.”

“You’re very welcome,” said Will. He went to the living room where he grabbed his coat and toed on his boots. He slapped his thigh and said, “Come on, boys.”

He opened the front door and the dog trotted out. Will sat down on his porch, watching as they got accustomed to the snow. He wrapped his arms around himself because the wind was biting. It wasn’t too fast or strong yet just really cold. The door opened behind him. Hannibal held out his mug which was steaming, “It’s cold. I poured you another cup of chocolate.”

“Thank you,” said Will, “Go back inside, it’s freezing.”

“They aren’t my dogs,” agreed Hannibal before shutting the door.

The dogs didn’t loiter and in under seven minutes Will’s cup was empty and the dogs were ready to go back inside. He dried their feet and the smaller ones’ stomachs at the door. The house was warmer than when he’d left and he quickly took off his coat and boots. “Sorry, I know it’s getting close in here but we’re gonna lose power.”

“It’s fine, Will. I completely understand.”

“Still,” said Will. “I don’t want you to be uncomfortable. Let me get you some light things to wear,” Hannibal didn’t argue so Will took that as acquiescence. In his bedroom he changed into thin PJ pants and took off his button down, replacing it with a worn long-sleeved t-shirt. He pulled out a thin shirt and pants for Hannibal. He brought them to Hannibal and said, “Here, you can change whenever you like.”

“Thank you,” said Hannibal accepting the clothes. “The snow is beautiful.”

“It is,” Will agreed as he sat down. He watched as the snow drifted against the cars, “At least tomorrow is Sunday.”

“What time do you get plowed?” asked Hannibal.

“In a regular storm at about six; in big storm it’s ten or eleven. But in this? Maybe after lunch. Sorry.”

Hannibal shook his head, “Will, stop apologizing. No more apologies. I’m sorry I’ve invaded your space. Being snowed in isn’t a problem as long as the company is pleasant and trustworthy and there’s food.”

“Trustworthy?” repeated Will.

“I was once snowed in with some very horrible men. It was unpleasant.”

Will knew there was a story there; there was a terribly sad note in his voice. But he didn’t go on and Will didn’t push. Instead he said, “It’s nice to have you here.” They fell silent watching the snow and eating cookies. After a few silent minutes Will said, “Would you like some coffee?”

“Only if you’re making it. I don’t really want coffee but I never turn down a cup.”

Will smiled, “I want coffee.” He stood and Hannibal stood.

“I should baste the chicken.”

The kitchen smelled great and Will breathed in deeply. “Good job, Hannibal.”

“The proof of the chicken will be in the tasting,” said Hannibal. He smiled as the sound of the grinder brought the dogs and Calvin climbed Will’s leg. “Patterns are comforting, knowing what comes next takes uncertainty out of the mix and allows us to feel in control. We go through a thousand ritualized patterns every day. Knowing someone else’s patterns fosters an

incredible sense of intimacy. That can either be very pleasant or distressing depending on the person."

"Oh?" asked Will.

"I like knowing that when you grind your coffee Calvin will use your leg as a ladder."

Will smiled and busied his hands with the grinder. Hannibal liked being intimate with him. Will felt his ears blush and didn't look up as he said, "I'm glad you don't hate my dogs."

"I can't hate them; they make your life easier." He patted Winston as he spoke.

"They do," agreed Will without looking it at Hannibal. He was still smiling too much.

"Would you shoo them, please? I don't want to open the oven with them so close."

Will pointed and said, "Out," their nails skittered over the floor. "There you go." Hannibal opened the oven and pulled the rack out a bit to baste the bird as Will got mugs, "Milk and sugar?"

"I doctor subpar coffee; yours needs no help."

"Thanks," Will said, handing off one of the mugs as Hannibal straightened up and shut the oven door.

"Thank you," said Hannibal, he took a sip, "I am going to change."

"Okay," agreed Will, enjoying his coffee and the soft sound of wind rushing past well-insulated walls. He walked into the living room and turned on the radio for updates. There were already power outs all over the place. "Just a couple more hours, please," Will whispered to no one, to the universe. "We just need power until the bird is cooked." He listened to the wind and sat down on the couch. Taking a cookie he went back to watching the snow listening to the radio. He picked up the house phone and dialed his dad without looking away from the snow. When the man picked up Will said, "Hi, I just wanted to let you know I'm gonna lose power. I don't know when I'll get it back. You have my cell phone number, right?"

"Yeah, boy, I do. You got flashlights and all that stuff?"

"And food, and blankets and Hannibal did some magic to the raw chicken in my fridge and it now smells amazing in my oven."

"It's supposed to be a big storm, honey, I heard about it all the way down here. You and Hannibal might be snowed in for a while."

"There are worse people to be snowed in with than Hannibal."

"I've been saying you needed a vacation."

Will laughed, "I'm taking a vacation when you come up."

“I’m excited to see you.”

“Me too. Anything you want to do while you’re here?”

“Nope. I just want to see you.”

“Okay,” Hannibal came back down. Will had to look away from the man dressed for bed. “Everything okay with you?”

“Everything is a-okay, Will. I’ll let you get back to your evening.”

“Thanks, Daddy.”

“Love you.”

“Love you too,” said Will before hanging up. “Sorry,” he said, “I didn’t want him to worry once the power went out.”

Hannibal was studying him, “There’s very close and then there is the relationship you have with your father.”

Will laughed and took a sip of his coffee. “When I was sick you saw me in every state of undress. I think you may have even given me a bath.”

“You were too feverish to stand for a shower,” Hannibal nodded. “I assure you it was purely medical.”

“You never asked about the scars on my arms.”

“I’m a doctor, Will: I know a suicide attempt when I see one.”

Will shook his head, “Not an attempt. I was dead. I joined the New Orleans police right out of college. I had a bachelor’s in forensic science. I thought if I used my scary, horrible brain to help people I would be able to master my fear. I went to college in Colorado. That was when I first saw snow. But, after school, I moved back to be closer to my dad. The cops were like Jack. I was fantastic in the lab but my bosses were impressed with the way my mind worked and wanted me in the field. There was this man.”

He took a deep breath, remembering the horror and swallowed it down, “He did the most depraved, violent and disturbing things to women. He started before they died and he didn’t finish until they were long past rotten. He was one of the most frightening things I’ve ever had in my head. My bosses pushed me to see him more clearly but there was something I was missing. I didn’t see it until I met him alone in an alley. He was retarded, I don’t mean that insultingly, I mean it medically. He had some form of mental retardation, he was looking for a mother in those poor women. I had a clean shot. I could have taken it, legally. But I couldn’t. I couldn’t shoot a retarded man. I knew what he was, what he’d done but I couldn’t do it. He stabbed me and got away. He killed four more women before someone else shot him. They put me in counseling but it was the same as always.” He shook his head, trying to clear it from his mind. The crime scenes had been so gory, so bloody and the smell. Jesus, that smell. Those poor women.

“Instead of trying to help me the doctor studied me. Found my mind fascinating. He really wanted to know what made me tick. How can someone with so many mirror neurons have any fixed personality of his own? How can a man with such a severe personality disorder got a job with the cops? He didn’t try to help me come to terms with the fact that I’d allowed four women to die. I quit and I tried to self medicate: I bought a puppy from a breeder. I actually paid for a dog. I thought it would fix me. It didn’t. I just cried a lot. And when I saw that even a puppy couldn’t fix me I took a straight razor and ran the blade up my arm. I had a nosy landlady. I lived in the apartment below her. She heard the thud and let herself in with her key. I died on the floor of my bathroom and in the ambulance, twice. I flat lined three times at the hospital. If there is anything worse than feeling so bad you think being dead would be better it’s the feeling you get when you wake up and find out it’s not over. My dad became my legal guardian and he took the money I’d made as a cop and used it to send me to grad school, right there in the city. He sold the dog and gave me a stray: Harry,” he pointed to the little dog who looked up at his name. Harry wagged his tail, clearly pleased for the attention.

“I lived with him while I was in school. I wrote a few very well received monographs. Then for three years I wrote monographs and worked on the boats with him. And four years back I got a letter from the FBI offering me the teaching position. I wanted it, they said nothing about field work, so my dad got lawyers and judges to change the custody agreement so I could live out of state. And he helped me move, helped me with the change, helped me pick this place and fix it up. His name is on the deed for the house and my car. Now I have to legally call him three times a week, I’m not allowed a credit card without his name on it, I can’t spend more than a thousand dollars in a day, my dad spends six weeks here and I have to spend two weeks in New Orleans at Christmas. A lot of his bills come out of our joint account. I insisted on that because I have to pay him back somehow. If he’s got a dependant at the age of sixty-four he’s gotta get a break. I’m probably the only person at the FBI who gets two months of paid vacation but I’m also probably the only one with a parent’s signature on their paperwork. So, that’s why we’re so close. I’m legally a minor and he worries that I might have another breakdown… if Jack doesn’t give me a break soon I will. But this time I’m just gonna have my dad quit for me, not kill myself.”

Will waited, held his breath, scared of what Hannibal was going to say. But what Hannibal said was, “Your father is a very sensible man. It sounds like that was that was exactly what you needed. And here you are, with seven dogs in a perfect house, a respected professor with quite a few well received monographs. You are very much a functioning individual with a strong personality. I’m sorry: when we first met I wanted to know how you ticked.”

“An fMRI can tell you all you need to know. I light it up like the Fourth of July. That’s all it is. They’re not sure why I have so many mirror neurons. It might be genetic but no one really knows. All anyone can say for certain is that I have roughly the same number of mirror neurons as a three-year-old. It not normal but it’s what I’m working with.”

“You do so well — forgetting about the BAU — you have a teaching job your good at, you have friends you socialize with, hobbies you enjoy and dogs that are so well looked after one would expect to see show medals on the wall. You have a personality disorder but your life is not disordered. Once you get rid of Jack you’ll be fine.”

“I can’t get rid of Jack.” He told Hannibal what Jack had said to him the night of the opera.

Hannibal looked appalled and said, “They can’t do that.”

“If you had a secretary and after a while asked her to do some filing and she said that that had never been part of her job description and she wasn’t doing it you would fire her and find a different secretary. My job evolved. Once I have my inevitable breakdown I’ll be out of my teaching job too. So I’m keeping it together for as long as possible.”

“That is no way to live, Will.”

“That’s why I have the boat and my dogs. I know who I am when I’m working on a boat or playing with them. There’s no one else in my head.”

Hannibal thought about it and said, “If you could have a perfect psychiatrist what would they be like?”

“An older man who doesn’t try to psychoanalyze me who looks at my symptoms: fear, depression, disassociation and nightmares and tries to treat those symptoms instead of the root. Georgia Madchen’s mother put it best: when it comes to mental illness it’s not about a cure it’s about managing your expectations. I need tricks and tools to get through the day and night I don’t need him to understand me. There is no cure expect, maybe, a partial lobotomy. I don’t even need a cure; I need a way to cope with Jack. I don’t want training to look people in the eye. I don’t care about eye contact. I don’t want to learn to make small talk.” He shrugged, “The idea of a cure… you couldn’t talk to someone and cure them of a missing leg, no matter of understanding it would ever make it so the person could walk without a prosthetic. I need a better prosthetic, not a way to understand the wound.”

“I know the perfect candidate,” said Hannibal. “Would you like to try it?”

“Can I quit if I don’t like him?”

“Of course you can.”

“Okay, I’ll try.”

Hannibal looked pleased as he said, “I should warn you: he’s quite friendly and informal. Will that be a problem?”

“Does he touch people?”

“When you meet him tell him you don’t like touch. He has a little dog in his office but that wouldn’t be a problem for you.”

“What’s the dog’s name?”

“I have no idea,” the other man was clearly amused and covered a smile by looking away. “Yours are the only dogs who I find interesting enough to learn their names. His name, the doctor, is Mortimer. He’ll introduce himself as Mort and takes no notice of people who call him Dr. Jacobs.”

“That sounds good, actually.”

“I’ll call him in the morning.” Hannibal looked at the piano and said, “Would you mind if I played that?”

“No, go for it. My dad is the only one who plays it.”

Hannibal moved to the piano bench while Will moved to the floor to work on the motor. As the song became recognizable Will hummed along. Hannibal sang softly, “I really can't stay.”

“But, baby, it’s cold outside,” he sang gently.

“I’ve got to go away.”

He didn’t look away from the motor. “But, baby, it’s cold outside.” He smiled at his hands. They sang together, Will never looked up. He didn’t want to know what he would learn if he looked at the other man now. He knew the song was a joke, chosen because of the weather not romance, but it still felt nice. He couldn’t sing well but neither could Hannibal. It was fun and silly.

Hannibal moved to Chopin then got up saying he was basting the chicken. It was nice. Will wasn’t sure if Hannibal had intended to have all the cookies eaten tonight but the container was empty and Will felt very comfortable in his own skin for once. “Chicken is done,” Hannibal called.

“It smells amazing,” Will called back, “Put it on top of the fridge or the dogs won’t be able to resist it.”

He heard Hannibal’s warm laughter as the man put it out of reach of the dogs. Will stood and went to the window. The drifts now went up to the windows of the car. He couldn’t see much but he could hear that the wind was picking up. He was glad Hannibal hadn’t tried to drive home.

There was a loud crash and the room went dark. The dogs instantly started barking and Will hushed them as he turned from the window. “Guys, calm down. Everything is okay.” The firelight glinted off the metal handle of one of the flashlights. He grabbed it from the table and, turning it on, found another one. Hannibal hadn’t said anything so he went to the kitchen and shined the lights for Hannibal. “I think a tree came down.” He realized that Hannibal’s eyes were wide, “You okay?”

“I stumbled into the fridge,” Hannibal seemed to be attempting to reclaiming his usual calm.

“Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Absolutely,” Hannibal went to straighten his shirt, clearly forgetting he wasn’t in a suit.

“Okay,” said Will. “I brought you a flashlight.”

Hannibal took it and seemed pleased. “Extreme weather unnerves me.”

“Don’t worry, this house very solid,” Will assured him.

“I’m sure it is,” agreed Hannibal and he seemed to be calming down but he still wasn’t himself.

Will got two glasses, putting his flashlight on the counter so the light hit the ceiling and filled the glass with cold water from the tap. Holding one out he said, “Drink that and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Everything is okay, promise.” Hannibal did as told and Will said, “Better?”

“Much,” agreed Hannibal. “Thank you.”

He still looked shocked and wide eyed. Will studied him and asked, “When were you last in a power out without a generator?” He guided him to one of the kitchen chairs and nudged him to sit down.

“Years ago… decades ago,” Hannibal said.

Will sat down and took a sip of his water. “Nothing bad is going to happen. We’ve got no big trees around the house; nothing can fall on us. The roof is very solid; we won’t have a cave in. We’ve got lots of food, lots of wood, lots of candles and lots of batteries. We have running water, warm blankets and warm dogs. Nothing is wrong.”

“How likely are neighbors to come over?” asked Hannibal, still clearly slightly nervous but he was breathing in and out just as Will had told him to. “Does anyone camp out here?”

“No one lives out here and no one comes out here. It’s all private land. If I don’t own it the Navy does. We’re not going to end up sheltering anyone. It’s just you, me and seven dogs. It’s going to be fine. I’m going to set up the lights and put some of the stuff in the fridge outside. Okay?” Hannibal nodded and took another sip from his glass. Will went to the living room and grabbed the matches from the mantelpiece. Lighting the candles took mere moments then he lit one of the Coleman lamps and brought it to the kitchen, “See, we’re equipped.” He went back and lit the other three, he placed one on top of the piano, one on the center of the table where the dogs wouldn’t knock it and took the last one back with him into the kitchen. “I have a few canisters of fuel for these in the basement. We won’t run out.” He saw Hannibal’s glass was empty and refilled it for him before opening the freezer. “Do you like ice cream? I have a pint of dulce de leche. It’s going to melt.”

“I like ice cream.”

“Good,” Will got the ice cream and bowls and spoons and placed them on the table, “Here, help yourself while I do the fridge.” He took a large bucket with a lid from under the sink and took the containers of soup from the freezer and put them at the bottom of the bucket and then took the ice holder from the freezer door and dumped all the ice into the bucket on top of the soup. He added the milk, the mayo, the hotdogs, the bacon and butter into the bucket. He was glad he didn’t have that much very-spoilable food and the cheese, eggs, olives, broccoli and three raw onions he had wouldn’t go bad left in the cool, but not cold, refrigerator for a few days. The frozen pizza, lone burrito and box of Hot Pockets were done for. He put the lid on the bucket saying, “I have a container for the chicken once it’s cool.” He went for his boots and coat in the living room and coming back into the kitchen he said, “I’m going to take this out.”

“Be careful,” said Hannibal.

“I will be,” Will promised. He left the Coleman lantern in the window, where it would light the outside just a bit and opened the door. The force of the wind was painful on his exposed face and hands. And it drove the snow into his flesh like tiny, cold shards of glass. He hurried down the steps — nearly slipping on the snow that had accumulated there — and jammed the pail into the snow, making sure the lid was secure against animals before going back inside quickly. “It is really rough out there.”

“Are you sure no animal will take that food?” Hannibal was serving the ice cream into the two bowls.

“It doesn’t smell and the lid is pretty much impossible to get off without two opposable thumbs. Nothing is getting into the food.” he untied his boots and left them by the door and hung his coat off the back of a chair. “And even if something did happen — which it won’t — we have tons of pasta and things that won’t go off in here. Nothing is going to happen.” He sat down across from Hannibal and accepted a bowl from the man. “Thanks,” said Will. “How are you doing?”

Hannibal didn’t look up from his ice cream. “I did not realize how poorly I would react to the power going out.”

“You said it yourself: fear is primal. You have nothing to apologize for. If anything, it’s nice to know you get spooked just like the rest of us.”

Hannibal looked up from the ice cream and gave him a rueful smile. “Most people like to see psychiatrists as strong and stable. You never want to lean on someone if they seem unsteady.”

“You aren’t my psychiatrist; you’re my friend. Friends can lean on each other… I think. I don’t have much experience with friends but I think that’s how it works.”

Hannibal chuckled before taking a bite of the ice cream. Swallowing he said, “True. That is how it works. A quid pro quo, I suppose, but that seems tawdry almost.”

“You prefer to always be leaned upon. But you can’t be strong every minute of every day. You’re in my pajamas; no one is here to see you panic,” Will took a bite of his own ice cream, not looking at Hannibal, giving the man some time to gather himself if he needed it.

“You’re here.”

“I don’t count,” said Will.

Hannibal looked up from his bowl, “Why don’t you count?”

“I don’t count because I don’t mind if you’re scared. It doesn’t change how I see you.”

“I don’t mind snow; I don’t mind power outs; but power outs caused by snow are a very matter.”

Will smiled as he took a bite. “Worst case scenario, okay? Something gets into the fresh food outside; I have enough pasta to feed Italy and nice jar sauces. My dad sends care packages and always includes dry pasta like it’s not readily available all over the country. We have enough food in here for weeks. We don’t get plowed out tomorrow? Okay. Do you know what’s hooked up to the same grid as this house? The Quantico paper records room. It’s not an essential room but I’ve never gone a full twenty-four hours without power. The government gets priority. So, we’ll have power in a day. And my road goes up to the back gates of Quantico. So the road will have to be plowed in the next three days. Max. The ground is warm and my pipes are deep so they can’t burst. So, worst case: we have to eat pasta and eggs, are without power for twenty-five hours and the road doesn’t get plowed for four days. You’ll get sick of me and the dogs and miss your appointments but that’s it. I’m going to play in the snow if we get stuck. You do not have to do that. I have a piano, some sketch pads and the radio. It’ll be a case of making your own amusements. It’s not that bad, right?”

“I’ll never get sick of you,” said Hannibal. “I find your company highly amusing.” He exhaled, “Thank you, Will. I feel much, much better.”

“Good, I’m glad,” Will finished his bowl and refilled it. “Let me call the power people.” He went to the living room where his phone was sitting on the coffee table. Winston made whining noises, clearly distressed, Will crouched as he dialed and stroked the upset dog, “It’s okay, Winston, it’s all okay. Don’t worry, boy.” He didn’t get a real person and he wasn’t surprised but he left a message with his information. Winston had calmed down and jumped up onto the couch.

When he went back to the kitchen Hannibal was calmly eating ice cream. “Do you want to move into the living room?” Will asked as he picked up his bowl of ice cream. Hannibal’d seemed shaky before but fine now.

“Yes, let’s go into the living room.” They took the Coleman lamps and their ice cream back into the living room. The dogs had spread out and fallen asleep in the warmth of the fire. The candle light and flames of the fire bathed the room in soft light and Hannibal said, “It’s actually quite comfortable and pleasant in here. You can’t even hear the storm.”

“My fort has solid walls; I need barriers against the world. Would you like the radio?”

“No, I’ll retake my place at the piano once I’ve finished my ice cream.” He went to the window and looked out. “You must think me rather foolish.”

Will shook his head though the man wasn’t looking at him. “I think something really bad once happened to you in a blackout during a snow storm. I will never go to the French Quarter ever again as I got stabbed there. We avoid the truly terrifying moments in our lives but you couldn’t tonight. I don’t think any less of you simply because you had a panic attack.” He settled down on the floor in front of the motor.

“I’ve heard the French Quarter is quite nice.”

“I guess so, I don’t know, I never liked New Orleans.”

“No?”

Will shrugged, “Not really. My dad and my brothers love it but…” He shrugged again, “It’s the sort of place where people take pride in ignorance. I moved a little north to get away from the rednecks… my brothers are rednecks.”

“Is your father a redneck?” asked Hannibal sounding interested. He turned away from the window to look at Will. Will had to crane his neck to look at him.

“No, he didn’t go to college, he’s poor and he works with his hands. But he’s smart, he reads books, he doesn’t own a gun, he doesn’t dislike black people or gay people, he doesn’t drink too much and he thinks women should be allowed to do what they want with their bodies. He’s southern but he’s not a redneck.”

“He’s coming soon.”

“He is.” Will agreed, “I washed his dressing gown a couple of days ago so it’s up in the closet for you in the morning.”

“Thank you.”

Hannibal had finished his ice cream and put the empty bowl down on the coffee table before crossing to the piano. “Do you mind?”

“Please, I like it.” Will started to work in earnest as Hannibal played, some opera Will almost recognized from elevators. His phone rang and Hannibal stopped playing. Looking at the screen he said, “It’s Alana Bloom.” He answered saying, “Hey, Alana, are you okay?”

“Power’s out. How about you?”

“Yeah, power’s out and Hannibal is stuck here with me. But we just ate the ice cream and now Hannibal’s playing the piano. Are you okay? Do you have everything you need?”

“Beer, chocolate, cheese, a book, a fire and tons of blankets and candles.”

“Good. You live closer to civilization so you’ll get plowed out right away once it stops. Hannibal and I might be sleepover buddies for a couple of days.”

“Are you not listening to the radio?”

“No, why?”

“It’s not going to stop until tomorrow afternoon.”

Will looked at Hannibal. It had taken him so long to calm him down but he had to be honest so he said, “Alana says the snow isn’t stopping until tomorrow afternoon. We might be out of power for longer than I thought.”

Hannibal gave a nod but said nothing. “So you two are having a party with the dogs and I’m here by myself?” she asked jokingly.

“True, we’ve got good company and Hannibal roasted a chicken before the power went out.”

“I’m jealous.”

“You should be jealous. But we don’t have chocolate and beer.”

“Oh, good point. I’ll stay here. I’m going to turn off my phone to save the battery.”

“Good idea, me too. Good night, Alana.”

“Night, Will.” They hung up and Will turned off his phone.

“Upstairs will stay warm for a few days. After that you can take my bed and I’ll move to the couch. It’ll all be okay.”

Hannibal shook his head, “I wouldn’t dream of taking your bed.”

“We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.”

“How is Alana?”

Will went back to his motor. “Fine, bored. She wishes she were here because she’s by herself. She has beer and chocolate so she’s happy enough.” Will stood and said, “I should put that chicken outside.”

“Do you need help?”

“Yes, please play the piano for me.”

Hannibal laughed and started playing again. Will picked up one of the lamps and went to the kitchen. The chicken was cool and Will got the chicken keeper out from the cupboard above the oven. He hummed along with the Bach coming from the living room as he moved the chicken from the pan into the Tupperware. Winston came and scratched at the door, “Are you sure, Winston? The weather is rotten.” Winston whined, “Okay.” Will snapped the lid shut on the Tupperware. He put the lamp in the window and put on his outside clothes. “Okay, back up.” He picked up the chicken and opened the door. It had gotten colder and the wind had gotten harsher. Winston was fast about his business as Will stashed the chicken under a chair on the deck. Winston was just as eager as him to go back inside.

In the living room he saw Hannibal was still playing. “I believe Alana. It’s not stopping any time soon.” He smiled at Hannibal. “You play the piano beautifully.”

“I started lessons when I was three,” said Hannibal. Will yawned, “Are you tired?”

“Sorry,” Will stretched. “Long day.”

“Let’s go to bed,” said Hannibal.

Will was glad for the weak light, he felt his ears blush. “Yeah, it’s late. I’ll make pancakes in the morning. Take a Coleman lamp and a couple of flashlights. Let me get you a toothbrush.

My dentist hands them out like candy." He took one of the Coleman lamps into his bathroom and got one of the seven still-boxed toothbrushes from the drawer. Going back he said, "Are you going to be okay? Do you want some of the dogs to sleep upstairs with you?"

"I'll be fine, but thank you. It's not an unreasonable question and it's kind of you to offer me your dogs." He walked around the room pinching out the candles. "You are very understanding. Have you ever considered becoming a therapist?"

Will laughed as he turned out two of the four Coleman lamps, "Goodnight, Hannibal. Sleep well."

"You too, Will," said Hannibal as he picked up one of the Coleman lamps and a couple of the little flashlights. "You've made tonight not simply bearable but pleasant. Thank you."

Smiling Will said, "You're welcome to get snowed in with me whenever you like."

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